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Plenus Rimarum sum, huc et illuc perfluo. TER.



HERE is no mark of our confidence taken more kindly by a friend, than the intrusting him with a secret ; nor any which he is so likely to abuse. Confidantes in general are like crazy fire-locks, which are no sooner charged and cocked, than the spring gives way, and the report immediately follows. Happy to have been thought worthy the confidence of one friend, they are impatient to manifest their importance to another ; 'till between them and their friend, and their friend's friend, the whole matter is presently known to *all our friends round the Wrekin*. The secret catches as it were by contact, and like electrical matter breaks forth from every link in the chain, almost at the

VOL. II.

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same instant. Thus the whole Exchange may be thrown into a buz to morrow, by what was whispered in the middle of *Marlborough Downs* this morning; and in a week's time the streets may ring with the intrigue of a woman of fashion, bellowed out from the foul mouths of the hawkers, though at present it is known to no creature living but her gallant and her waiting-maid.

As the talent of secrecy is of so great importance to society, and the necessary commerce between individuals cannot be securely carried on without it, that this deplorable weakness should be so general is much to be lamented. You may as well pour water into a funnel, or a sieve, and expect it to be retained there, as commit any of your concerns to so slippery a companion. It is remarkable, that in those men who have thus lost the faculty of retention, the desire of being communicative is always most prevalent where it is least to be justified. If they are intrusted with a matter of no great moment, affairs of more consequence will perhaps in a few hours shuffle it entirely out of their thoughts: but if any thing be delivered to them with an air of earnestness, a low voice, and the gesture of a man in terror for the consequence of it's being known; if the door is bolted, and every precaution taken to prevent a surprise; however they may promise secrecy, and however they may intend it, the weight upon their minds will be so extremely oppressive, that it will certainly put their tongues in motion.

THIS breach of trust so universal amongst us, is perhaps in great measure owing to our education. The first lesson our little masters and misses are taught, is to become blabs and tell-tales; they are bribed to divulge the petty intrigues
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of the family below stairs to pappa and mamma in the parlour, and a doll or a hobby-horse is generally the encouragement of a propensity which could scarcely be attoned for by a whipping. As soon as children can lisp out the little intelligence they have picked up in the hall or the kitchen, they are admired for their wit: if the butler has been caught kissing the housekeeper in his pantry, or the footman detected in romping with the chambermaid, away flies little *Tommy* or *Betsy* with the news; the parents are lost in admiration of the pretty rogue's understanding, and reward such uncommon ingenuity with a kiss and a sugar-plumb.

NOR does an inclination to secrecy meet with less encouragement at school. The governantes at the boarding-school teach mis to be a good girl, and tell them every thing she knows: thus, if any young lady is unfortunately discovered eating a green apple in a corner, if she is heard to pronounce a naughty word, or is caught picking the letters out of another mis's sampler, away runs the chit who is so happy as to get the start of the rest, screams out her information as she goes, and the prudent matron chucks her under the chin, and tells her that she is a good girl, and every body will love her.

THE management of our young gentlemen is equally absurd: In most of our schools if a lad is discovered in a scrape, the impeachment of an accomplice, as at the *Old Bailey*, is made the condition of a pardon. I remember a boy, engaged in robbing an orchard, who was unfortunately taken prisoner in an apple-tree, and conducted under a strong guard of the farmer and his dairy-maid, to the master's house. Upon his absolute refusal to discover his associates,

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the pedagogue undertook to lash him out of his fidelity, but finding it impossible to scourge the secret out of him, he at last gave him up for an obstinate villain, and sent him to his father, who told him he was ruined, and was going to disinherit him for not betraying his school-fellows. I must own I am not fond of thus drubbing our youth into treachery, and am much more pleased with the request of *Ulysses* when he went to *Troy*, who begged of those who were to have the charge of *Telemachus*, that they would above all things teach him to be just, sincere, faithful, and to keep a secret.

EVERY man's experience must have furnished him with instances of confidantes who are not to be relied on, and friends who are not to be trusted; but few perhaps have thought it a character so well worth their attention, as to have marked out the different degrees into which it may be divided, and the different methods by which secrets are communicated.

NED TRUSTY is a tell-tale of a very singular kind. Having some sense of his duty, he hesitates a little at the breach of it. If he engages never to utter a syllable, he most punctually performs his promise; but then he has the knack of insinuating by a nod and a shrug well-timed, or a seasonable leer, as much as others can convey in express terms. It is difficult, in short, to determine, whether he is more to be admired for his resolution in not mentioning, or his ingenuity in disclosing a secret. He is also excellent at a "doubtful phrase," as Hamlet calls it, or an "ambiguous giving out," and his conversation consists chiefly of such broken innuendos

As,

As, well, I know—or, I could—an if I would—

Or, if I list to speak—or, there be, an if there might &c.

Here he generally stops; and leaves it to his hearers to draw proper inferences from these piece-meal premises. With due encouragement however, he may be prevailed on to slip the padlock from his lips, and immediately overwhelms you with a torrent of secret history, which rushes forth with more violence for having been so long confined.

POOR MEANWELL, though he never fails to transgress, is rather to be pitied than condemned. To trust him with a secret, is to spoil his appetite, to break his rest, and to deprive him for a time of every earthly enjoyment. Like a man who travels with his whole fortune in his pocket, he is terrified if you approach him, and immediately suspects that you come with a felonious intent to rob him of his charge. If he ventures abroad, it is to walk in some unfrequented place, where he is least in danger of an attack. At home, he shuts himself up from his family, paces it to and fro in his chamber, and has no relief but from muttering over to himself, what he longs to publish to the world; and would gladly submit to the office of town cryer, for the liberty of proclaiming it in the market place. At length however, weary of his burthen, and resolved to bear it no longer, he consigns it to the custody of the first friend he meets, and returns to his wife with a cheerful aspect, and wonderfully altered for the better.

CARELESS is perhaps equally undefining, though not equally excusable. Intrust him with an affair of the utmost importance, on the concealment of which your fortune and happiness depend: he hears you with a kind of half-atten-

tion ; whistles a favourite air, and accompanies it with the drumming of his fingers upon the table. As soon as your narration is ended, or perhaps in the middle of it, he asks your opinion of his sword-knot, damns his taylor for having dressed him in a snuff-colour'd coat instead of a *pompadour*, and leaves you in haste to attend an auction ; where, as if he meant to dispose of his intelligence to the best bidder, he divulges it with a voice as loud as the auctioneer's ; and when you tax him with having played you false, he is heartily sorry for it, but never knew that it was to be a secret.

To these I might add the character of the open and unreserved, who thinks it a breach of friendship to conceal any thing from his intimates ; and the impertinent, who having by dint of observation made himself master of your secret, imagines he may lawfully publish the knowledge it has cost him so much labour to obtain, and considers that privilege, as the reward due to his industry. But I shall leave these with many other characters, which my reader's own experience may suggest to him, and conclude with prescribing, as a short remedy for this evil,—That no man may betray the counsel of his friend, let every man keep his own.